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AUTHOR Krakow, Jere L.
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ABSTRACT

High school social studies teachers' perceptions of the study of history were measured in this study. Specifically, it assessed their opinions of the most important topics in the field of history, and how their opinions were influenced by their sex, teaching experience, and size of high school. An introductory section offers a historical overview of approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of American schools. In 1963 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was established. This body spent several years identifying basic social studies objectives, as well as specific objectives for subject areas within social studies. The research described in this paper used NAEP's objectives in a questionnaire administered to almost 700 high school social studies teachers in Missouri. Teachers believed the history of western cultures was most important, followed by history of eastern cultures, India, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. They also ranked, in order of importance, political science, U.S. history, economics, sociology, world history, and geography. Teachers who had the most years of teaching experience agreed most with NAEP's objectives for U.S. and world history. Teachers in small high schools who had more experience viewed Latin American history objectives more favorably than did less experienced teachers in medium and large sized high schools. One conclusion is that researchers should examine why history, especially non-western history, is regarded as less important than several other social sciences. (Author/AV)

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Which History Is Most Important? Views from Secondary History Teachers.

by

Jere L. Krakow

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WHICH HISTORY IS MOST IMPORTANT?
Views from Secondary History Teachers

To speak of American culture and the role of education in maintaining it is to speak of phenomena inextricably intertwined. Cultures are transmitted from one generation to the next in many ways. In America, formal education has assumed much of the responsibility for this transmission. Yet the role of education has not been limited to perpetuating the society of the parent generation. Americans have traditionally sought to go beyond what exists - to "improve" upon what they have. This notion of progress came to mean universal education, though paradoxically, this education was designed to enforce homogenity and conformity.

From the colonial period to the present, schools have been asked to turn out a uniform product. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this meant that schools would strive to perpetuate the religious faith of the community. But for a nation becoming more urban and industrialized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religious virtue was not enough. Those entering the schools needed more and the cultural core demanded equal opportunities for all, acculturation of immigrant and rural children, and the enculcation of virtues or morality in the young. Moreover, American society required the schools induce responsible citizenship and the ability and willingness to work.

As the nation changed from one in which formal education was provided for the few to one in which education was compulsory for all, an increasing financial commitment was necessary. Different eras required varying priorities from America's schools. These in turn produced changing criteria for evaluating the products of the schools. School-district patrons,

academicians, politicians, social reformers and self-appointed critics examined the student and charged the schools with failure in meeting the needs of society. Achievement test scores, vocational success, technological breakthroughs or lack of them, the number of graduates or conversely the number of dropouts were all used to evaluate American education. This was a mixed lot at best ranging from superficial evaluation to tightly designed micro studies providing empirical evidence about the success or failure of the schools. Obviously some more rigorous testing procedures were necessary before any judgements could be made.

Spurred by the launching of Sputnik in 1957, educators began a period of frantic activity designed to alleviate criticism. As new curricular programs were developed, questions of their effectiveness kept cropping up. How could the new programs be evaluated? One way was to make goals or objectives specific so that it would be possible to attain them. In turn this required evaluation procedures which could measure what students were achieving after they were introduced to the new curriculum . This additional information now has become available for determining the effectiveness of formal education.

In 1963, feasibility studies were launched which resulted in a project designed to assess the progress of education in the United States. Through the efforts of Francis Keppel, John Gardner and Ralph Tyler, committees were established to measure educational progress. The result was a project known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The model for assessing what Americans of four different age levels know was developed between 1963 and 1968. A randomly stratified sample was drawn from each of four regions of the nation using both rural and urban settings. Committees were established

to develop objectives which were used as the basis for writing the exercises. Trained examiners employed to administer the instruments used gathered the data for the project. The aim was to determine what Americans know. Ten subject matter areas were decided upon and each was to be assessed two to three times over a ten year period. The data collected would provide a pool of information from which to base decisions on public expenditure for education.

One of the ten subject areas for which a set of objectives was to be developed was social studies. The procedure followed was one of contracting with a private firm for the initial development of objectives and then screening and refining these through review committees composed of social scientists, classroom teachers and interested lay adults.[1] What resulted became the five major objectives for the social studies which guided the exercise development.[2]

The process of developing social studies objectives began in June, 1965 when the Exploratory Committee contracted with Educational Testing Service. The development process was thorough beginning with an August, 1965 conference of social scientists who met with the contractor's staff to establish guidelines for developing the objectives. During the fall of 1965, interested laymen representing various organizations (American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization, League of Women Voters, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, State Boards of Education, United States Chamber of Commerce, and several others) met in panels for the purpose of reviewing the objectives for the ten subject areas being

assessed. Late in 1965, the chairmen of the panels met to pool recommendations among which was the idea that social studies objectives needed to emphasize more ". . . the degree of competence in such fields as history, geography, economics, political science and sociology."[3]

Final revisions of the social studies objectives were completed during 1966 when social scientists, classroom teachers and interested lay adults met several times with representatives of Educational Testing Service and the Exploratory Committee. In the fall of 1966, they were in final form and became the substantive basis of formulating exercises to determine what young Americans knew in social studies. The objectives were:

1) Have Curiosity About Human Affairs

2) Use Analytic-Scientific Procedures Effectively

3) Are Sensitive to Creative-Intuitive Methods of Explaining the Human Condition

4) Have Knowledge Relevant to the Major Ideas and Concerns of Social Scientists

5) Have A Reasoned Commitment to the Values That Sustain a Free Society.[4]

National Assessment concluded that the social studies objectives developed ". . . were restatements and summarizations of objectives that had appeared over the last quarter of a century."[5] It seems National Assessment has supportive evidence for the objectives it developed as they relate to goals for the social studies over the years or as related to an eclectic approach to developing them as Engle implies and Murra, Wesley and Zink endorse.[6]

The concern of this study is how social studies teachers in Missouri high schools perceive history: What broad topics are most important? What patterns emerge in their perceptions? Does sex of the teacher, years of

teaching experience or size of high school make any difference in the perceptions? What are the implications for history departments in colleges and universities?

A questionnaire utilizing all the age-specific (lowest level) objectives of the social studies from the project known as The National Assessment of Educational Progress was developed. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each objective on a four-point Likert scale: Most Important - 4, Important - 3, Least Important - 2, and Unimportant - 1.

During the fall of 1973, 689 questionnaires were mailed to a randomly stratified sample of high school social studies teachers in Missouri. Three follow-up mailings were sent in order to maximize returns which resulted in 621 answer sheets received, a return rate of 37.9 per cent.

The data were then run through a computer and cross tabulations were done on the variables of size of high school, sex and number of years of teaching experience of the respondents, and the respondents perception of the history objectives. Proportions of agreement with the objectives by the variables were examined, using a .05 level of significance.

The history objectives are grouped for purposes of analysis with the topics and number of objectives in each group as follows:

Topic	No. of Objectives
Europe	12
United States	9
Far East	5
Middle East	5
Latin America	4
India/SE Asia	3
Africa, Sub-Saharan	3
Total	41

Examples of objectives developed by National Assessment which were used in the questionnaire include:

American History:

1. The student will understand the urbanization of the United States, with emphasis on the influx from European and rural areas, the changing population of cities, and the problems of metropolitan areas.

World History:

1. The student will understand some of the major developments in Latin American history: Such as the development of three Indian cultures, with emphasis on the distinctive features of each.

2. The student will understand some of the developments in Middle Eastern history: Such as the Arab empire, with emphasis on its extent and on Islamic culture.

3. The student will understand some of the major developments in European history: Such as Facism and the Second World War, with emphasis on economic depression, the failure of the League of Nations, the corporate state in Italy, Naziism in Germany, genocide aggression, Allied victory, and the Cold War.

4. The student will understand some of the developments in the history of India and Southeast: Such as independence movements; with emphasis on Gandhi, the religious basis for the formation of India and Pakistan, Indonesia, and the struggle for Vietnam.

5. The student will understand some of the developments in the history of Africa south of the Sahara: Such as the major tribal groups and the existence of early African kingdoms.

6. The student will understand some of the developments in Middle Eastern history: Such as the development of monotheism, with emphasis on Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic ideas and values.

7. The student will understand some of the major developments in Far Eastern history: Such as the response of China and Japan to the West, with emphasis on the early rejection of the West, the danger of Chinese dismemberment, the Kuomintang Revolution, the modernization of Japan, and Japanese efforts to dominate the Far East.

Overall, measures serve to illustrate several relationships between and among topical groupings. Means were computed for each of the topics and the results of the rank-order were:

Topic	Mean
United States	3.22
Europe	2.95
Middle East	2.80
Far East	2.74
India/SE Asia	2.63
Latin America	2.62
Africa, Sub-Saharan	2.43

This rank order confirms what has been known for some time, namely, that certain broad topics of history are viewed as more important than others. This is of particular concern since national trends indicate continuing emphasis on the third world and emerging nations in our secondary school social studies curricula.[8] For us in Missouri, this confirmation is especially noteworthy in light of changing requirements in social studies for high school graduation and the proliferation of special topics courses running for nine weeks to a semester. Additionally, a degree of ethnocentricism seems likely in the agreement with the objectives which relate to western cultures.

The mean values of the subject areas in social studies are likewise revealing. The grouping, World History, contains all of the non-United States topics which were listed above.

Subject Area	Mean
Political Science	3.27
United States History	3.22
Economics	3.02
Sociology	2.89
World History	2.78
Geography	2.58

This rank order shows what classroom teachers perceive about objectives in some of the disciplines usually included under the rubric of social studies.

The cross tabulations of the dependent variable (agreement with the objectives) and the independent variables (sex, years of teaching experience, and size of high school) brought out several statistically significant (.05 level) findings. The independent variable to which the most significance can be attached was years of teaching experience. It seemed that the more years of teaching experience teachers had, the more they agreed with the objectives in the clusters of United States and World History.

Statistically significant sub-patterns within the independent variables included the fact that females with 11-20 years experience saw Latin America as Important - 3, while those who had over 20 years of teaching experience saw the topic either Most Important - 4, or Least Important - 2.

The cluster, Middle East history, illustrated that teachers with 6-20 years of experience in the small high schools of Missouri (enrollment 34-215) viewed the objectives as Important - 3 or Least Important - 2. Those teachers in large high schools (450-27,445 enrollment) who had taught 11-20 years had a rather skewed pattern of agreement with the Sub-Saharan Africa objectives. They responded either Most Important - 4 or Unimportant - 1.

India and southeast Asia as a group of objectives was seen differently by males and females teaching in small high schools. Males tended to view the objectives rather evenly from Most Important - 4 to Least Important - 2, while females observed them as either Important - 3 or Least Important - 2.

Other findings which are not statistically significant, but still

important suggest that those objectives pertaining to phenomena which occurred during the twentieth century were seen as more important regardless of which cluster of history they appeared in. Item means were highest for those objectives subsumed in United States and European history.

Teachers in small high schools who had more experience tended to view objectives in Latin American history as more favorable than the less experienced in medium and large sized high schools. European history objectives were seen as Important - 3 rather than Most Important - 4 by females in small high schools, both sexes in medium sized high schools (enrollment of 216-499) and teachers with 6-10 years experience in all three sized high schools.

Among all history objectives the areas that obtained values of Unimportant - 1 were Sub-Saharan Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and Asia. The least experienced teachers (1-5 years of experience) viewed the three areas as lesser in importance. Finally, teachers in large high schools held a more skewed view toward the objectives related to the three areas above with responses at either end of the continuum rather than scattered along it.

In light of the findings of this study it seems that several implications for collegiate departments of history can be drawn. One general area for evaluation is the history curriculum as it relates to clusters of course offerings. Departments need to ask why non-western history is seen as less important. It may be that our commitment has been skewed toward the inexcusable perpetuation of a certain largely ethnocentric world view.

A second area of evaluation must look at both curriculum and personnel, History, particularly non-western history, is seen as less important than several of the social sciences. We as a profession have been largely oblivious,

yes, even cavalier, about the role of history in the public school curriculum. Clio may be sacrosanct in the state certification requirements of Missouri, but in the eyes of the public school staff, especially the inexperienced, it is less important than several sister disciplines. Third, it appears that collegiate history departments have not kept in close contact with secondary social studies teachers. The data above underscores the fact that teachers perceive United States history and European history as very important but curriculum offerings are changing in the public schools. Many topics related to the third world or emerging nations are now being offered. We need to encourage secondary social studies teachers to seek new knowledge: perhaps conferences, or short courses and regular departmental offerings for those who have been teaching several years. Efforts must be made to persuade publishers to develop textual materials that contain material on non-western societies and cultures.

Finally, we need to encourage our professional organizations to take the lead in developing position papers and long range plans on curricular guidelines for preparing history majors and minors, and on educational leave arrangements for additional faculty training.

We as a profession are rather complacent about our position within the academic community, but the data above indicate that we need to take some initiative, especially in areas concerned with non-western history and the relative position of history to complementary disciplines.

FOOTNOTES

[1]National Assessment of Educational Progress, Social Studies Objectives (Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, 1970), pp. 4-8.

[2]Ibid., pp. 9-27.

[3]"Summary of Development of Social Studies--1965-1972, "unpublished," p. 1.

[4]National Assessment, et. al., op. cit., pp. 9-27.

[5]Ibid., p. 8; Richard E. Gross and Glen F. Ovard, "A Review of Aims and Objectives in Social Education," Social Studies, 51 (October, 1960), pp. 170-174.; Richard E. Gross and William V. Badger, "Social Studies," Encyclopedia of Educational Research, ed. Chester W. Harris (New York: Educational Research Association/The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 1928; John Francis Nash, "A Study of the Relevance of Selected Major Concepts and Generalizations from the Field of Sociology to Commonly Accepted Objectives of the Social Studies in the Secondary School" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1962), abstracted in Dissertation Abstracts, Vol. 23, pp. 4622-4623; John Albert Nidds, "An Analysis of the Written Recommendations of Major Committees, Commissions and Selected Projects on Objectives in the Secondary School Social Studies Between 1890 and 1963" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, St. John's University 1968), abstracted in Dissertation Abstracts, Vol. 30A, p. 484-A; Nichols Michael Michelli, "Social Studies Teachers and Instructional Objectives" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1972), abstracted in Dissertation Abstracts, Vol. 33, p. 4068-A; Glen F. Ovard, "Planning Social Studies Facilities for Secondary Schools " (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1958), abstracted in Dissertation Abstracts, Vol. 19, pp. 2833-2834; Shirley H. Engle, "Objectives of the Social Studies," Indiana University School of Education Bulletin, 4C (March 1964), pp. 1-11.

[6]Wilburn F. Murra, Edgar B. Wesley, and Norah E. Zink, "Social Studies," Encyclopedia of Educational Research, ed. Walter S. Monroe (New York: American Educational Research Association/The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 1134.

[7]Ibid., pp. 9-27.

[8]Curriculum Service Center, "Curriculum Report," National Association of Secondary School Principals, 3, No. 6 (June 1974), pp. 1-12; Social Science Education Consortium, "Newsletter," No. 10 (May 1971), pp. 1-6.